


## **Formar para Intervir: reflexões sobre trabalho colaborativo a partir de metodologias ativas de aprendizagem no Ensino Superior**

Training to Intervene: reflections on collaborative work based on active learning methodologies in Higher Education

Formación para Intervenir: reflexiones sobre el trabajo colaborativo basado en metodologías activas de aprendizaje en la Educación Superior

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### **RESUMO**

O presente trabalho analisa a utilização de metodologias ativas de aprendizagem no Ensino Superior, com foco no trabalho colaborativo desenvolvido nas unidades curriculares de Métodos e Técnicas de Investigação Social e de Serviço Social de Casos, Grupos e Comunidades, da licenciatura em Serviço Social de uma universidade portuguesa. Centradas na participação ativa dos estudantes, as unidades curriculares assentam em metodologias promotoras da construção coletiva do conhecimento, do pensamento crítico e da interligação entre teoria e prática. Este artigo pretende analisar e discutir a percepção dos estudantes inscritos nestas duas Unidades Curriculares relativamente ao trabalho colaborativo realizado com recurso a metodologias ativas de aprendizagem, bem como identificar as competências por eles adquiridas e a importância que atribuem a estas experiências para a sua formação académica. A abordagem metodológica consistiu num estudo de caso descritivo-exploratório, privilegiando-se o inquérito por questionário como instrumento mais adequado para a recolha de dados. Foram obtidas informações quantitativas, analisadas estatisticamente, e dados mais descritivos e textuais (n = 20), recorrendo-se a uma interpretação do seu conteúdo. Os resultados demonstram que o trabalho

colaborativo entre Unidades Curriculares que utilizam metodologias ativas de aprendizagem favorece, por um lado, o desenvolvimento de competências fundamentais para a prática profissional, como a comunicação com públicos diferenciados, a adaptabilidade e flexibilidade, e por outro, estimula a reflexão crítica e o exercício de práticas investigativas e interventivas desde a formação inicial. Conclui-se que a utilização deste tipo de metodologia, especialmente no campo do Serviço Social, fortalece a aprendizagem significativa e prepara os estudantes para os desafios da prática profissional na sociedade atual.

**Palavras-chave:** Metodologias ativas de aprendizagem; Serviço Social; Ensino Superior.

## ABSTRACT

The present work analyses the use of active learning methodologies in higher education, focusing on the collaborative work developed in the curricular units of Methods and Techniques of Social Research and Social Work of Cases, Groups and Communities, within the undergraduate degree in Social Work of a Portuguese university. Focused on the active participation of students, the curricular units were based on methodologies that promote the collective construction of knowledge, critical thinking and the integration between theory and practice. This study aims to understand the perception of the students enrolled in these two curricular units regarding the collaborative work developed; to identify the skills they acquired and the relevance they attribute to these experiences in their academic training. The methodological approach consisted of a descriptive-exploratory case study, favoring the questionnaire survey as the most appropriate instrument for data collection. Quantitative information, statistically analyzed, and more descriptive and textual data were obtained, using an interpretation of its content (n = 20). The results show that the collaborative work between curricular units that use active learning methodologies favors the development of fundamental skills for professional practice, such as communication with different audiences, adaptability and flexibility, while stimulating critical reflection and the exercise of investigative and interventional practices from initial training. It is concluded that the use of this type of methodology, especially in the field of Social Work, strengthens meaningful learning and prepares students for the challenges of professional practice in today's society.

**Keywords:** Active learning methodologies; Social Work; Higher education.

## RESUMEN

El presente trabajo analiza el uso de metodologías de aprendizaje activo en la educación superior, centrándose en el trabajo colaborativo desarrollado en las unidades curriculares de Métodos y Técnicas de Investigación Social y Trabajo Social de Casos, Grupos y Comunidades, del grado en Trabajo Social de una universidad portuguesa. Enfocadas en la participación activa de los estudiantes, las unidades curriculares se basaron en metodologías que promueven la construcción colectiva del conocimiento, el pensamiento crítico y la integración entre la teoría y la práctica. El estudio que aquí se presenta tiene como objetivo comprender la percepción de los estudiantes matriculados en estas dos unidades curriculares sobre el trabajo colaborativo desarrollado, identificar las habilidades adquiridas por ellos y conocer la relevancia que atribuyen a estas experiencias en su formación académica. El abordaje metodológico consistió en un estudio de caso descriptivo-exploratorio, favoreciendo la encuesta por cuestionario como el instrumento más adecuado para la recolección de datos. Se obtuvo información cuantitativa, analizada estadísticamente, y datos más descriptivos y textuales, utilizando una interpretación de su contenido (n=20). Los resultados muestran que el trabajo colaborativo entre unidades curriculares que utilizan metodologías de aprendizaje activo favorece el desarrollo de habilidades fundamentales para la práctica profesional, como la comunicación con diferentes públicos, la adaptabilidad y la flexibilidad, al tiempo que estimula la reflexión crítica y el ejercicio de prácticas investigativas e intervencionistas desde la formación inicial. Se concluye que el uso de este tipo de metodologías, especialmente en el campo del Trabajo Social, fortalece el aprendizaje significativo y prepara a los estudiantes para los desafíos de la práctica profesional en la sociedad actual.

**Palabras clave:** Metodologías de aprendizaje activo; Trabajo Social; Enseñanza superior.

## Introduction

Contemporary society is characterized by profound and constant economic, social, and technological changes resulting from the phenomena of industrialization and globalization. These phenomena have exerted a broad influence on the digitalization of communication processes, the (re)transformation of work environments, and the imposition of considerable changes in education (Cidral et al., 2018). With more specific regard to the context of Higher Education, these transformations have brought new challenges to institutions and their actors – faculty and students – confronting traditional teaching models and demanding new pedagogical approaches that are more dynamic, inclusive, collaborative, and

contextualized (Esgaio & Gomes, 2018).

Although Higher Education has historically been centered on more lecture-based practices, the reality is that it has increasingly been confronted with the need to adapt to a significant diversity of student profiles in terms of social and cultural backgrounds, economic conditions, life experiences, future perspectives, among other aspects (Balsa, et al., 2001; Valadas; Gonçalves & Faísca, 2011). The traditional pedagogical paradigm, marked by student passivity and the centrality of the instructor's role as a transmitter of knowledge, has proven to be misaligned with the needs of an ecological form of education that prepares students for increasingly complex, dynamic, collaborative, and interdisciplinary labor contexts. Corroborating this view, recommendations issued by the European Commission (EC, 2022) emphasize the importance of Higher Education institutions adapting to contemporary societal challenges by increasingly integrating education, research, and innovation within a framework of partnership with the labor market, thereby accelerating and facilitating the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

In this context, increasing importance is placed on valuing the quality of the pedagogical relationship between instructor and student, in which the instructor assumes the role of facilitator of the learning process and promoter of stimulating and reflective educational environments (Muna & Kalan, 2021; Mangas & Sousa, 2024). Accordingly, the contemporary challenge lies in constructing pedagogical practices capable of fostering not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of critical, ethical, and collaborative competencies aligned with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Alves & Teo, 2020).

This issue becomes particularly salient when focusing on professions within the sphere of social intervention, namely Social Work, whose practitioners must demonstrate technical and knowledge-based competencies closely associated with the ability to conduct research and carry out social diagnoses, as well as intervention competencies related to the capacity to act and to intervene. It should also be noted that communication and interpersonal relationship skills are equally important, as established in Portuguese legislation that created the Portuguese Order of Social

Workers and its statutes, regulating access to the profession, professional practice, and deontological standards (Law No. 121/2019 of September 25).

In light of the above, two curricular units – Methods and Techniques of Social Research and Social Work with Individuals, Groups and Communities – within the undergraduate degree in Social Work at a Portuguese Higher Education institution were developed in close articulation during the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, grounded in active learning methodologies. The objective was to enable students to acquire research and action competencies applied to a social reality chosen by the students themselves, toward which they directed an investigative and interventive perspective. The purpose of this article is to analyze and discuss the perceptions of students enrolled in these two curricular units (CUs) regarding the collaborative work carried out through active learning methodologies, as well as to identify the competencies they acquired and the importance they attribute to these experiences for their academic training. Methodologically, the study is framed as a case study directed at the enrolled students, with data collected through an online questionnaire survey, followed by statistical and content analysis, as presented in the following sections.

## **Theoretical framework**

The debate on transformations in Higher Education points to the emergence of a constructivist conception of learning, understood as an active and interactive process between the individual and the environment (Albuquerque, 2016). This approach rejects the dichotomy between teaching and learning, proposing instead an integrated view of the educational process in which knowledge is socially constructed and mediated through experience.

The valorization of learning as a situated and contextualized process reflects a paradigm shift that emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by Piaget's constructivism, Vygotsky's sociointeractionism, and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. These perspectives emphasize the active role of students in knowledge

construction, assigning teachers the function of mediators and facilitators of this process.

The transition from the traditional paradigm to constructivist-oriented approaches has increasingly consolidated itself as a relevant field of research, enabling a deeper understanding of the importance of active methodologies in students' academic trajectories and learning outcomes (Alt, 2018). The massification of Higher Education, combined with the demands of the knowledge society and technological transformations, has intensified the need to rethink pedagogical models centered on the unilateral transmission of content (Alves & Teo, 2020; Cheng *et al.*, 2009; Chan, 2004). In this regard, active learning methodologies have emerged as a response to new educational needs, requiring individuals who are critical, creative, and capable of applying knowledge in complex and unpredictable contexts (Albuquerque, 2016), by promoting educational environments that encourage participation, autonomy, and collaborative knowledge construction (Freire, 1982; Misseyanni *et al.*, 2018).

According to these authors, active methodologies are grounded in practices that cognitively engage students through activities such as collaborative reading, reflective and critical debates, problem-solving, project-based work, case studies, flipped classrooms, simulations, among others, fostering knowledge acquisition and the development and mobilization of competencies. These practices contrast with methods centered on memorization and the comprehension of static content, demonstrating superior effectiveness in the apprehension of complex concepts (Gusc & Van Veen-Dirks, 2017; MacVaugh & Norton, 2012).

Furthermore, active learning responds to the profile of contemporary students and to the demands of an ecological professional education capable of integrating ethical, technical, and political dimensions (Forni *et al.*, 2017; Esgaio & Gomes, 2018; Vales & Santos, 2018). Nevertheless, given the diversity of active methods, each instructor must critically analyze which approaches are most appropriate for their students, the nature of their curricular units, and the available resources.

Although this article does not aim to provide an exhaustive discussion of the

various studies published on active learning methodologies, it highlights those focused on the field of Social Work, which is the area of training of the participants in the empirical component of this study.

Research (Walsh et al., 2021; Drolet & Harriman, 2020; Teater, 2017; Cabassa, 2016) has demonstrated the need for the academic training of social workers to incorporate a stronger connection to practice contexts, breaking with traditional paradigms centered on lecture-based and theoretical methodologies. In this regard, particular emphasis is placed on the contributions of Traber et al. (2021) and the program developed – Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) – designed for a new generation of Social Work students in Canada. The primary objective of this program is to integrate research and practice throughout academic training, rather than limiting this integration to the internship period. The TFEL program develops training and guidance sessions for faculty and students aimed at integrating research as a daily practice through innovative educational strategies, as highlighted by the authors (Traber et al., 2021). While recognizing its added value, the authors also acknowledge the challenges faced in terms of training models/curricular plans and acceptance by both faculty and students.

Along the same lines, Frossard and Aguiar (2023), in a theoretical discussion on disruptive learning grounded in teaching–learning methodologies that promote competencies necessary for contemporary Social Work practice, highlight the important role that educational games have played in innovating the teaching–learning process, with the curricular internship, that is, practice, being considered the privileged space for applying these methodologies. The same authors (Frossard & Aguiar, 2023) further warn of the need to develop innovative pedagogical practices that enable grounded and contextualized everyday intervention, arguing that training that provides greater proximity to practice will foster the development of reflective and interventive competencies among future social workers.

Ize et al. (2018), in their reflections on the importance of the Social Work internship and its implications for student training, highlight students' difficulties in relating content learned during the course to the daily realities of the internship,

requiring them to mobilize theoretical knowledge in practice, a task they do not always manage successfully due to a lack of autonomy, limited understanding of reality, insufficient critical attitude, or lack of predisposition. They also emphasize that contemporary education should promote an attitude of co-responsibility toward learning, grounded in mutual commitment between faculty and students, which would enable a more effective articulation between theory and practice.

Therefore, in response to training demands, particularly in Higher Education, where the complexity of intervention contexts requires integrative, interdisciplinary, and contextualized pedagogical approaches (Macedo et al., 2019), the valorization of collaborative work between CUs is suggested. The integration of curricular units through joint projects, interactive activities, and shared methodologies not only enhances more meaningful learning, but also reinforces perceptions of coherence and applicability of the taught content (Silva & Araújo, 2021). This articulation between domains of knowledge allows students to understand social challenges holistically, mobilizing theoretical and practical knowledge within a research–action logic that brings them closer to professional reality, where, in most cases, different forms of knowledge are simultaneously mobilized.

According to Guo et al. (2020), strategies such as Project-Based Learning, case studies, and collaborative learning promote the co-construction of knowledge, shared responsibility, and the development of competencies such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork, competencies that are indeed valued in the training of social workers. The pedagogical intentionality of articulating curricular units may reinforce the active role of students in structuring their own learning, creating synergies and opportunities for continuous engagement, interdisciplinary dialogue, and collective reflection.

In this sense, studies such as those by Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023) demonstrate that methodologies such as structured debates and project-based group work not only encourage critical thinking but also strengthen students' social commitment and autonomy. Such practices gain particular relevance when associated with professional practice contexts, where curricular integration enables stronger links between research

and intervention, as emphasized by Traber et al. (2021) within the framework of the Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) program.

Thus, the intentional and collaborative use of active learning methodologies across different CUs may constitute a promising pathway toward more critical, contextualized, and socially committed training, contributing to the education of reflective, interventive, and socially engaged professionals.

## Methodology

The study developed aims to address a topic with impact and relevance within the academic context. It followed a qualitative methodology insofar as it sought to explore, understand, and interpret a set of meanings produced by a group of students from Portuguese Higher Education (Gonçalves et al., 2021; Coutinho, 2015). Based on this general research design, a descriptive-exploratory case study was considered the method best suited to respond to the intended approach, given that this strategy allows for understanding the how and the why of the events or phenomena under study (Yin, 2014).

This methodological option enables the topic to be understood from its real context and to address questions regarding the importance of using student-centered pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering students' investigative and interventive practice during their academic training and, subsequently, in the context of their professional practice.

In this sense, the following objectives were defined:

- i) to understand the role of the use of active methodologies in the education of Social Work students;
- ii) to identify students' perceptions regarding the articulated functioning between the curricular units Methods and Techniques of Social Research and Social Work with Individuals, Groups and Communities;
- iii) to understand the importance students attribute to the completion of academic work involving research and intervention;

iv) to identify the competencies acquired by students through the collaborative work developed in the two curricular units based on active learning methodologies.

### **Study participants**

The case study presented is based on a collaborative experience between two curricular units from the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the undergraduate degree in Social Work at a Portuguese university.

The participants were the 33 students enrolled in both CUs during the 2024–2025 academic year. They were selected through convenience sampling, in a non-random manner (Coutinho, 2018), and were contacted via email. The email was sent on January 31, 2025, containing a brief description of the study's objectives and requesting participation through completion of an online questionnaire survey, the access link to which was included in the body of the email. A total of 20 completed questionnaires were obtained.

### **Data collection instrument**

The questionnaire survey was selected as the most appropriate instrument for data collection. This instrument allows for rapid responses, low cost, anonymity, and ease of access (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2015; Fortin, 2009).

The instrument was developed based on the theoretical framework of reference, with questions prepared systematically and carefully (Muñoz, 2003), including both closed-ended and open-ended responses. It was structured into five main sections: the first focused on the sociodemographic characterization of respondents; the second addressed the use of active methodologies throughout the academic trajectory; the third examined the collaborative work developed between the curricular units; the fourth explored respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of active methodologies on the teaching–learning process; and the final section addressed aspects related to overall satisfaction and the main challenges identified.

After the instrument was developed and made available via Google Forms, it

was reviewed by two experts for content and form validation, with the aim of ensuring the internal validity of the instrument. As no suggestions for improvement were made, the questionnaire was then subjected to a pre-test administered to two individuals with characteristics similar to those of the participants, in order to ensure the instrument's relevance. Following the pre-test, the questionnaire was sent by email to the participants.

The participants considered in this non-representative case study are the respondents to the questionnaire (n = 20).

In order to comply with the ethical procedures required for scientific research, an informed consent request for free and informed participation in the study was included in the header of the form.

Regarding data processing, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Vilelas, 2009; Bryman, 2015), while more descriptive and textual data were subjected to content interpretation (Guerra, 2006).

## **Data analysis and discussion of results**

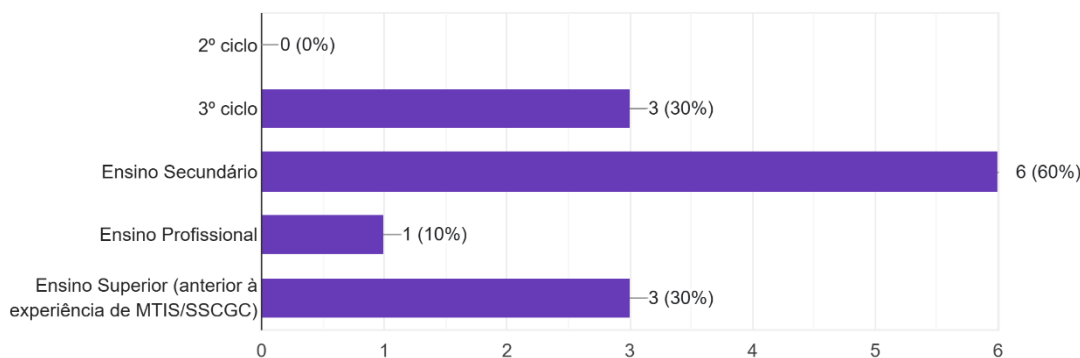
A total of 20 students participated in the study, all of whom attended the curricular units Methods and Techniques of Social Research (MTSR) and Social Work with Individuals, Groups and Communities (SWIGC). Of these, 18 were female and 2 were male, aged between 19 and 22 years, with the majority (n = 11) being 19 years old. These participant characteristics are aligned with the profile of Social Work students, as this field of study is predominantly composed of female students, reflecting the global panorama of the profession (Torres, 2024).

## **Active learning methodologies throughout the academic trajectory**

When asked about their contact with active learning methodologies throughout their academic trajectory, half of the respondents (n = 10) stated that they had such contact, while the remaining respondents were divided between those who had never had contact (n = 6) and those who did not know (n = 4).

Among those who reported having had contact with active methodologies, the majority identified Secondary Education as the academic context in which these experiences occurred, as shown in Figure 1. It should be noted that, for some respondents, Higher Education also emerged as one of the contexts, which highlights the growing importance being attributed to this type of methodology. This trend is, to some extent, aligned with one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Quality Education, which seeks, among other objectives, to increase the number of young people and adults with relevant qualifications and technical and professional skills.

**Figure 1** – First contact with active learning methodologies



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025)

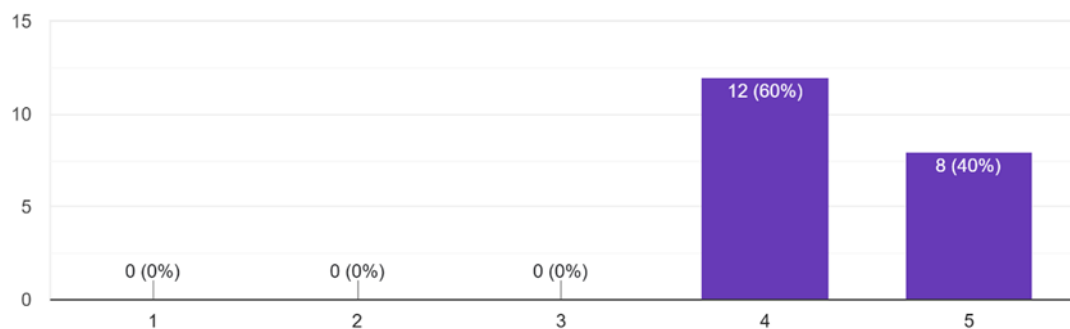
With regard to the most frequently used strategies, the data reveal that debates emerge as the most commonly employed strategy (n = 6), followed, each with the same number of responses (n = 4), by competency-based learning, that is, the development of practical and applicable skills; project-based learning; and cooperative learning.

These findings are consistent with those reported by Pérez (2024) concerning the effectiveness of active methods in a Spanish university context, highlighting debates, case studies, and Project-Based Learning (PBL) as relevant strategies for the development of social research competencies among Social Work students.

## Collaborative work between curricular units

Regarding respondents' evaluation of the collaborative work experience carried out in the two CUs, quantitative data reveal a highly positive perception (Figure 2). On a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (where 1 represents a very poor experience and 5 represents an excellent experience), none of the respondents assigned a score below 4. Specifically, 60% (n = 12) of the students rated the experience with a score of 4, while the remaining 40% (n = 8) assigned the maximum score (5). These results indicate that 100% of the participants considered the collaborative experience between the two CUs to be good or excellent.

**Figure 2** – Perception of the collaborative work experience



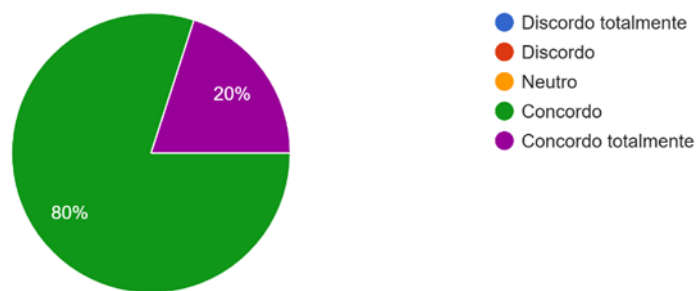
**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025)

The absence of negative or neutral responses highlights the high level of satisfaction with the implemented pedagogical experience, suggesting that the articulation between the two curricular units was perceived as coherent, effective, and productive. The concentration of responses at the higher end of the scale (scores 4 and 5), corresponding to 95% of the sample, indicates that the methodologies and dynamics employed in the two CUs fostered active student participation and engagement with the proposed content and activities.

When asked whether the different components of the work developed for the CUs, one with investigative characteristics focused on diagnosing the selected contexts and the other oriented toward intervention through sociocultural and

educational animation activities, were clearly integrated into the work carried out, all responses were positive, as documented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3** – Perceptions of the integration of the research and intervention components in the work of the CUs



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025)

The data reveal a correspondence between the perception of clear integration of the research/intervention components and the positive evaluation of collaboration. This is equivalent to stating that, when collaborative work effectively integrates diagnosis and action (two fundamental dimensions of intervention in Social Work) the experience is more highly valued. As noted by Munna and Kalam (2021), activities that link theory to practice foster students' ability to mobilize theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios.

### Relevant aspects for the completion of the work

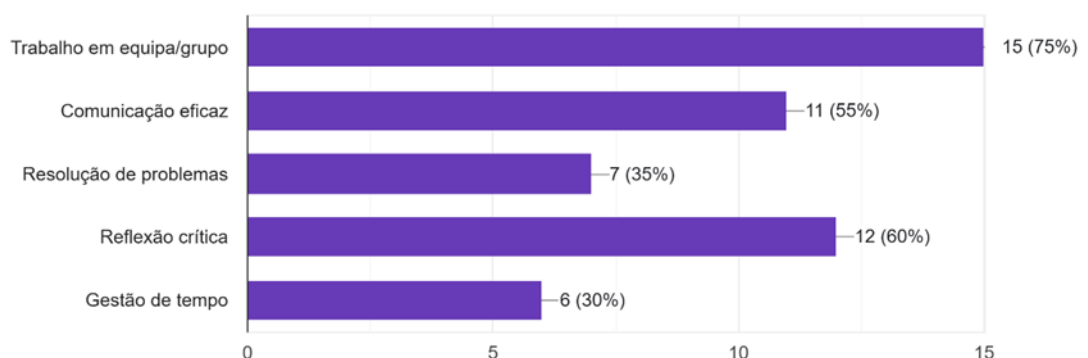
When asked to identify the aspects they considered to have been most successfully achieved during the development of the research and intervention work (Figure 4), students selected, among the five response options, the following: a) teamwork/group work (n = 15), which was the most highly valued aspect, highlighting the relevance and impact of collaborative work as a central element of the educational experience; b) critical reflection (n = 12), which stood out as a widely mobilized cognitive competence and one that is fundamental in work of this nature; and c)

effective communication (n = 11), a competence that reinforces the importance of clarity in sharing ideas and in articulating interactions among team members and intervention contexts.

Similar results were found in the study by Ferrer-Aracil et al. (2023), which showed that the implementation of debates as an active methodology in Social Work CUs at a university in Alicante favored the development of transversal competencies such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and autonomy. Along the same lines, Frossard and Aguiar (2023), in their discussion on the use of active methodologies, namely educational games and simulations, in supervised Social Work internships, emphasize the importance of these methodologies in promoting cognitive, motor, and communicative skills, as well as the capacity to act in contexts of vulnerability. Munna and Kalam (2021) also highlight collaborative work as an important factor in enhancing student engagement when students are placed in activities that employ active learning methodologies.

On the other hand, problem-solving and time management emerged as the least valued aspects, which may indicate some difficulty among students in dealing with challenges, finding solutions, and simultaneously managing time throughout the course of the work.

**Figure 4** – Aspects most successfully achieved during the completion of the work

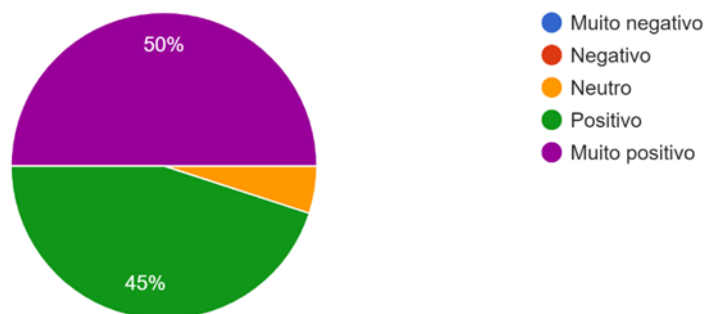


Source: Prepared by the authors (2025)

## Impact of active learning methodologies on Social Work education

The majority of students evaluated the impact of active learning methodologies as positive (n = 9) or very positive (n = 10) with regard to the development of their practical learning and their training as future social workers, as shown in Figure 5. Only one respondent adopted a “neutral” position.

**Figure 5** – Perceptions of the impact of the use of active learning methodologies



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025)

These results reinforce the literature that points to the effectiveness of active learning methodologies in strengthening professional competencies in higher education, particularly in fields such as Social Work, where reflective practice and contextualized intervention are essential pillars of training (Altshuler & Bosch, 2003; Munna & Kalam, 2021; Frossard & Aguiar, 2023).

## Competencies mobilized

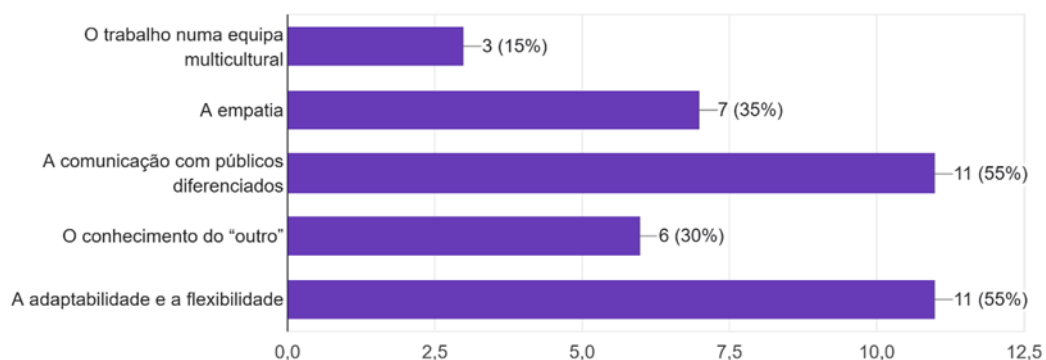
Students were invited to select up to two competencies, from the five options presented (working in a multicultural team; empathy; communication with diverse audiences; knowledge of the “other”; adaptability and flexibility), which they considered to have mobilized most prominently during the research and intervention work carried out in the two CUs. Although respondents were given the option to indicate other competencies, none did so.

Analysis of the responses (Figure 6) reveals two competencies that were valued equally, namely: communication with diverse audiences, which was selected by 55% of students (n = 11), highlighting the importance of communicative competence in social intervention contexts marked by sociocultural diversity and the need to adapt language and approaches to the specificities of different target groups; and adaptability and flexibility, also selected by 55% (n = 11).

These data, aligned with Altshuler and Bosch (2003), demonstrate students' perceptions regarding the requirement for constant adjustment in the face of unforeseen challenges, contextual needs, or changes in intervention plans, reinforcing the dynamic dimension of social work.

The second most highly valued competency was empathy, selected by 35% of respondents (n = 7), underscoring the relevance of emotional engagement, active listening, and understanding the experience of the other, central aspects of Social Work practice.

**Figure 6 – Competencies mobilized**



**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2025)

Seeking to understand the importance of using active learning methodologies within a collaborative logic between CUs, students were asked whether the methodologies employed contributed to a better understanding of the content. The responses were highly informative: 60% (n = 12) of respondents agreed and 35% (n = 7) strongly agreed. This perception indicates that the articulation between theory and

practice, promoted through participatory pedagogical strategies, fostered meaningful learning. The high level of agreement also demonstrates that students value approaches that place the subject at the center of the educational process, as argued in studies on the topic, such as Singer and Moscovici (2008), and more recently Marques et al. (2021) and Munna and Kalam (2021).

### **Overall evaluation**

Regarding overall satisfaction with the work developed in the two CUs, all respondents expressed satisfaction, with half (n = 10) stating that they were “satisfied” and the other half (n = 10) “very satisfied.” This is interpreted as recognition of the added value of active learning methodologies in this particular undergraduate program, given that the data do not allow for generalizations, and may also be an indicator of pedagogical success, revealing that these strategies foster student engagement and motivation.

When asked about the possibility of recommending the use of active learning methodologies in other CUs of the Social Work program, 75% responded “definitely yes” and 20% “probably yes,” evidencing the value attributed to this experience and the potential for its replication in other CUs.

### **Challenges**

Considering the work carried out by students, of an investigative and interventive nature, within a collaborative framework and grounded in active learning methodologies, and based on a list of options, the aim was to understand the challenges they faced and how these were overcome. The main challenge identified by students was time management (65%), followed by the unavailability of external participants (10%), namely professionals and technical directors from the various institutions where students collected data and implemented interventions. This trend has also been recognized by Walker and Gant (2021). In analyzing the impact of critical reflection among Social Work students in the United Kingdom, these authors emphasize that engagement in reflective methodologies requires not only institutional

resources, but also time for planning, monitoring, and articulation with other CUs.

Lack of material resources and difficulty in the practical application of knowledge had limited expression (5% each), while the option “lack of guidance from instructors” was not selected by any of the respondents.

This emphasis on time as a constraint suggests that, although the methodological model was effective, it demands a high level of organizational capacity from students, who had to reconcile this work with other CU requirements within a single semester, as well as with all the constraints inherent to academic work, such as coordinating schedules, lack of responses, or limited availability of material and human resources.

Based on an optional open-ended response, respondents were able to describe how they dealt with the identified challenges. Nine responses were recorded, highlighting several strategies adopted to overcome the constraints encountered, namely: “organization” (R4, R16, R19), “time management” (R5, R9, R11), “communication” (R3), and “flexibility” (R4, R13) as key factors in overcoming difficulties.

In addition to operational strategies, one respondent (R2) explicitly mentioned the presence of “anxiety” as a significant emotional factor during the process, although it did not prevent the achievement of the proposed objectives. This finding suggests the importance not only of acquiring planning and adaptation competencies, but also of emotional management to cope with challenges that arise in various academic and professional situations.

## Conclusion

The present study aimed primarily to analyze the contribution of active learning methodologies to the education of students enrolled in the Social Work undergraduate program, focusing on the pedagogical experience resulting from the articulation between two curricular units, Methods and Techniques of Social Research (MTSR) and Social Work with Individuals, Groups and Communities (SWIGC). The data

obtained made it possible to fulfill the defined objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding the use of participatory and collaborative methodologies in Higher Education, as well as the competencies developed throughout the process.

The unanimous positive evaluation of the collaborative work experience between the two CUs reveals the pedagogical potential of interdisciplinary articulation when grounded in active teaching–learning strategies. This result validates the pedagogical intentionality underlying the initiative by demonstrating that students recognize the coherence, complementarity, and relevance of the work developed, particularly in the integration between diagnosis and intervention – core dimensions of professional practice in Social Work. This perception is consistent with the assumptions put forward by authors such as Munna and Kalam (2021) and Traber et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of training practices that critically and reflectively articulate academic knowledge with real contexts of action.

With regard to the competencies acquired, students consistently identified the development of capacities essential to professional practice: teamwork, critical reflection, communication with diverse audiences, empathy, and adaptability. These results reinforce the formative value of methodologies such as debates, case studies, problem-based learning, and collaborative projects – already recognized in the literature and discussed here (Ferrer-Aracil et al., 2023; Frossard & Aguiar, 2023) as promoters of engagement, autonomy, and social commitment.

Another noteworthy aspect is students' recognition of the importance of carrying out academic work that integrates research and intervention. The perception of the usefulness and practical applicability of these experiences not only legitimizes their role in curriculum design but also points to the need to rethink the place of practice from the early stages of training, rather than restricting it to the internship period, as advocated by Drolet and Harriman (2020) and by the Canadian TFEL program (Traber et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the challenges identified, particularly with regard to time management. This constraint reflects the increased

demands that active learning methodologies place on planning, coordination of schedules, and autonomy in organizing academic work. These limitations, also identified by Walker and Gant (2021), should be considered in the creation of institutional conditions that support the continuity and effectiveness of such practices.

In summary, the results confirm that the use of active learning methodologies, anchored in collaborative work between CUs, effectively contributes to more meaningful, student-centered learning aligned with the ethical, technical, and reflective principles that guide professional practice in Social Work. Although generalization of the data is not possible due to the limited number of participants and the nature of the study, this research constitutes a relevant contribution to the valorization of innovative and integrative pedagogical practices in Higher Education, with potential for replication and further development in future studies.

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